



(19)

Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
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(11)

EP 0 862 072 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
02.09.1998 Bulletin 1998/36

(51) Int Cl. 6: G02B 6/38

(21) Application number: 98301460.6

(22) Date of filing: 27.02.1998

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU MC
NL PT SE
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

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(30) Priority: 27.02.1997 JP 44371/97
05.09.1997 JP 241527/97

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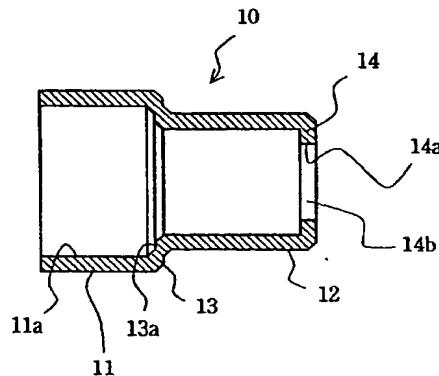
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(54) Clamp rings and optical fibre terminating structures

(57) A clamp ring 10 for connecting a tensile strength member to the periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule retaining part for holding a ferrule, in which an optical fibre of an optical fibre cable incorporating a coated optical fibre and the tensile strength member surrounding the coated optical fibre is inserted and fixed with an outer covering of the optical fibre cable stripped off from its terminal portion, the clamp ring 10 comprising a first annular portion 11 which fits on the periphery of the rear end portion of the ferrule retaining part, a sec-

ond annular portion 12, a connecting portion 13 interconnecting the second annular portion 12 and the first annular portion 11, and a clamping portion 14 extending from the rear end of the second annular portion 12 in such a way that the extreme end of the clamping portion 14 secures the periphery of the optical fibre cable, in which the first annular portion 11, the second annular portion 12, the connecting portion 13 and the clamping portion 14 are formed as a unitary body having approximately the same wall thickness throughout. An optical fibre terminating structure with a similar arrangement.

FIG. 1



EP 0 862 072 A2

Printed by Jouve, 75001 PARIS (FR)

Description

The present invention relates to clamp rings such as those used in optical connectors which are located between optical fibre transmission lines for switching, connecting or disconnecting the transmission lines and those directly fitted to ferrules, as well as to optical fibre terminating structures.

Presently, detachable optical connectors are used for connecting optical fibre cables and optical fibre cords intended for short-distance applications such as in-building wiring and wiring to equipment. Since optical fibres are so thin and flexible they are usually secured by using ferrules. An optical connector is constructed of a plug incorporating a ferrule and an adaptor incorporating a sleeve.

FIG. 6 shows a cross section of an optical connector employing a conventional crimp ring. As shown in FIG. 6, a ferrule 101 in which an optical fibre 201 is inserted and fixed has a flange 102. A stopper 104a is fitted behind a rear end portion of the ferrule 101 in the back of the flange 102 with a compression spring 103. Spring 103 is mounted on the outer periphery of the rear end portion of the ferrule 101. This means that the ferrule 102 is fitted in such a way that it can move relative to the stopper 104a in its axial direction, with the aid of the compression spring 103. A coated optical fibre 202 is inserted into the compression spring 103 and the stopper 104a. A tensile strength member 204 of an optical fibre cable 203 is located at the rear end of the stopper 104b. The tensile strength member 204 is secured around the outer periphery of a rear end portion of the stopper 104b by crimping a crimp ring 105.

As shown in FIG. 7, the crimp-on ring 105 is formed of: a first cylindrical portion 111, whose inside diameter fits the outer periphery of the rear end portion of the stopper 104b; a second cylindrical portion 112, which fits on the outer periphery of the optical fibre cable 203; and a connecting part 113 interconnecting the first and second cylindrical portions 111, 112. The first cylindrical portion 111 is crimped to secure the tensile strength member 204 between an inside curved surface 111a of the first cylindrical portion 111 and the stopper 104b. Then, the second cylindrical portion 112 is crimped to firmly hold the optical fibre cable 203 in position, with a compressive effect provided by an inside curved surface 112a of the second cylindrical portion 112.

Since the optical fibre cable 203 is held in position with compressive and frictional forces exerted by the inside curved surface 112a of the second cylindrical portion 112; its total securing force varies as a result of changes in the outside diameter of the optical fibre cable 203. It is therefore necessary to design the crimp-on ring 105 with varying inside diameters of the second cylindrical portion 112 to cater for changes in the outside diameter of the optical fibre cable 203. In addition, the outside diameter of the second cylindrical portion 112 should be made suitable for the diameter rating of a

crimping tool to be used. Thus, one problem is that the crimp-on ring 105 is remarkably expensive, because it is conventionally produced by cutting an aluminium material, for instance. Another problem is that the second cylindrical portion 112 becomes relatively thick, as a result of a relationship between the outside diameter of the optical fibre cable 203 and the diameter rating of the crimping tool, thereby requiring a great force in the crimping operation.

This invention is intended to solve these problems and has as an object the provision of clamp rings which are easy to crimp and manufacture.

Also known in the prior art are structures for terminating optical fibre ends by directly fitting a ferrule to each end of an optical fibre cord. An example of such a structure is shown in FIGS. 8A-8B. As shown in FIGS. 8A-8B, after inserting a coated optical fibre into a ferrule, a tensile strength member 204 of an optical fibre cable 203 is placed around the periphery 302 of a rear end portion of the ferrule 301. A ring member 303 is fitted, and both ends of the ring member 303 are fixed in position by an adhesive 304, to thereby secure the individual components in integral form.

Such conventional structure has a problem that a sufficient tensile strength (about 10 kgf) can not be achieved, since the tensile strength member 204 is fixed by using the adhesive 304.

Another problem of this conventional structure is that it increases the chance of fibre breakage. This is because the adhesive 304 is sucked into the tensile strength member 204 and that portion of the tensile strength member 204 where the adhesive 304 has been sucked in loses flexibility.

The structure has yet another problem in that it requires a good deal of man hours for assembly work, and the adhesive 304 needs a long time to cure.

The invention aims at solving these problems. Accordingly, it is also an object of the invention to provide a structure which makes it possible to directly secure an optical fibre cable to a ferrule without using an adhesive. It is also an object of the invention to provide an optical fibre terminating structure which has a sufficient tensile strength without causing a loss of optical fibre cable flexibility, yet permitting ease of production.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a clamp ring for connecting a tensile strength member to the periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule retaining part for holding a ferrule, in which an optical fibre of an optical fibre cable incorporating a coated optical fibre and said tensile strength member surrounding the coated optical fibre is inserted and fixed with an outer covering of said optical fibre cable is stripped off from its terminal portion, said clamp ring being characterised in that it comprises:

a first annular portion which fits on the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule retaining part;
a second annular portion;

a connecting portion interconnecting said second annular portion and said first annular portion; and a clamping portion extending inward from the rear end of said second annular portion in such a way that the extreme end of said clamping portion secures the periphery of said optical fibre cable; and that
said first annular portion, said second annular portion, said connecting portion and said clamping portion are formed as a unitary body having approximately the same wall thickness throughout.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided an optical fibre terminating structure for connecting a tensile strength member to the periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule, in which an optical fibre of an optical fibre cable incorporating a coated optical fibre and said tensile strength member surrounding the coated optical fibre is inserted and fixed with an outer covering of said optical fibre cable stripped off from its terminal portion, said optical fibre terminating structure being characterised in that said tensile strength member is connected to the periphery of a rear end portion of said ferrule by a clamp ring with one end thereof crimped on the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule and the other end thereof crimped on the periphery of said optical fibre cable.

The aforementioned clamp ring of the invention is formed by a press-forming operation, for example.

In this structure, it is preferable that the clamp ring comprises a first annular portion which fits on the periphery of the rear end portion of the ferrule. A second annular portion is located in the back of the first annular portion, the second annular portion having a smaller diameter than the first annular portion. A step portion interconnects the second annular portion and the first annular portion. A clamping portion extends inward from the rear end of the second annular portion, in such a way that the extreme end of the clamping portion secures the periphery of the optical fibre cable. The first annular portion, the second annular portion, the step portion and the clamping portion are formed from a single piece of metal having approximately the same wall thickness throughout.

Preferably, the periphery of the rear end portion of the ferrule is formed into a surface having pits and protrusions.

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described in more detail, by way of further example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of a clamp ring according to an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of an optical connector employing the clamp ring of the invention;

FIGS. 3A-3B are exploded cross-sectional diagrams showing an optical fibre terminating structure

according to a second embodiment of the invention; FIG. 4 is a diagram showing one variation of the optical fibre terminating structure according to the second embodiment of the invention;

FIGS. 5A-5B are exploded cross-sectional diagrams showing an optical fibre terminating structure according to a third embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of an optical connector employing a crimp-on ring of the prior art; FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional view of the clamp ring of the prior art; and

FIGS. 8A-8B are diagrams illustrating one example of an optical fibre fixing method using a clamp ring of the prior art.

FIG. 1 shows a cross section of a clamp ring according to an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 1, the clamp ring 10 of this embodiment comprises: a first annular portion 11; a second annular portion 12, having a smaller diameter than the first annular portion 11; a step portion 13, connecting the first annular portion 11 and the second annular portion 12 to each other; and a clamping portion 14, which is provided immediately adjacent to the rear end of the second annular portion 12 and extends inward. All these portions are formed as a single piece. The inside diameter of an opening 14b, formed by an end face 14a of the clamping portion 14, is made slightly larger than the outside diameter of the earlier mentioned optical fibre cable. The

outside diameter of the second annular portion 12 is set to fit the diameter rating of a crimping tool to be used in the crimping operation. The first annular portion 11 has an inside diameter which fits a rear end portion of a stopper as described earlier. It is constructed so that a tensile

strength member is secured between an inside curved surface 11a of the first annular portion 11 and an inside surface 13a of the step portion 13, when the first annular portion 11 is crimped from around its outer periphery.

FIG. 2 shows a general construction diagram of an optical connector which employs the clamp ring of this embodiment. As shown in FIG. 2, a ferrule 31, in which an optical fibre 21 is inserted and fixed, has a flange 32. The stopper 34a is fitted behind a rear end portion of the ferrule 31, in the back of the flange 32, with a compression spring 33. Spring 33 is mounted on the outer periphery of the rear end portion of the ferrule 31. A coated optical fibre 22 is inserted into the compression spring 33 and the stopper 34a. A tensile strength member 24 of an optical fibre cable 23 is located at the rear end of the stopper 34b. The tensile strength member 24 is secured between the clamp ring 10 and an outer peripheral surface of the rear end portion of the stopper 34b by crimping.

As stated above, the inside diameter of the opening 14b, formed by the end face 14a of the clamping portion 14, is slightly larger than the outside diameter of the above-mentioned optical fibre cable. The outside diameter of the second annular portion 12 is set to fit the di-

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meter rating of the crimping tool used in the crimping operation. The optical fibre cable 23 is clamped by the clamping portion 14 by crimping the second annular portion 12 with the crimping tool. The tensile strength member 24 is secured between the inside curved surface 11a of the first annular portion 11 and the stopper 34, and between the inside surface 13a of the step portion 13 and the stopper 34, by crimping the first annular portion.

The clamp ring 10 of this embodiment provides the advantageous effects that it can be produced extremely easily by press forming, for instance, and its crimping operation can also be performed relatively easily.

Clamp rings of the invention and optical connectors employing the clamp rings are not limited to the above-described embodiment in their basic construction. For example, an optical connector may be a resin-molded product in which a flange, a compression spring and a stopper are integrally formed.

FIG. 3A-3B show an optical fibre terminating structure according to a second embodiment of the present invention. A clamp ring 40 used in this embodiment includes a main annular portion 41, which fits on the outer periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule. Ring 40 also has a clamping portion 42, which extends inward from the rear end of the main annular portion 41 so that its innermost end clamps the outer periphery of an optical fibre cable 23. The main annular portion 41 and the clamping portion 42 are formed as a one-piece metallic part having an approximately uniform thickness.

The inside diameter of an opening 42a formed by the clamping portion 42 is made slightly larger than the outside diameter of the aforementioned optical fibre cable 23. The outside diameter of the main annular portion 41 is set to fit the diameter rating of a crimping tool used in the crimping operation. Further, the inside diameter of the main annular portion 41 is made slightly larger than the diameter of the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51. Thus, the tensile strength member 24 is secured between an inside curved surface 41a of the main annular portion 41 and the outer periphery 53 of the ferrule 51. The parts are joined by crimping both ends of the main annular portion 41 from around its outer periphery.

The ferrule 51, in which an optical fibre 21 is inserted and fixed, has a flange 52. The outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51, on which the aforementioned clamp ring 40 is fitted, is located in the back of the flange 52. In this embodiment, three stepped ridges 54a-54c are integrally formed on the surface of the outer periphery 53.

It is needless to say that the flange 52 may be produced either as a discrete component (of stainless steel, for instance), or as an integral part of the ferrule.

The following discussion deals with a procedure for making a terminating structure in which the optical fibre cable 23 is connected to the ferrule 51 using the aforementioned clamp ring 40.

As shown in FIG. 3A, the clamp ring 40 is passed

over the optical fibre cable 23. An outer covering, or jacket, of the optical fibre cable 23 is removed near its end to expose the coated optical fibre 22, the tensile strength member 24 and the optical fibre 21. The optical fibre 21 is inserted into an optical fibre insertion hole 25 of the ferrule 51 while the coated optical fibre 22 is inserted into a core insertion hole 26 of the ferrule 51. The optical fibre 21 and the coated optical fibre 22 are secured in position with an adhesive readily filled in the aforementioned optical fibre insertion hole 25 and the core insertion hole 26.

The tensile strength member 24 of the optical fibre cable 23 is located around the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51, thus being attached at this point. With the tensile strength member 24 disposed between the clamp ring 40 and the outer peripheral surface of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51 at the back of the flange 52, the clamp ring 40 is crimped and fixed by using the crimping tool as shown in FIG. 3 (b). Thus, the tensile strength member 24 can be secured in position by crimping the ferrule side of the clamp ring 40. The jacket (formed of PVC, for instance) of the optical fibre cable 23 can be secured by crimping the optical fibre cable side of the clamp ring 40.

Subsequently, the far end of the ferrule 51 is polished together with the optical fibre 21, to complete an optical fibre cable product already fitted with a ferrule.

As shown by the foregoing discussion, the present embodiment provides the advantageous effects that it avoids the conventionally used adhesive, the optical fibre cable 23 and the ferrule 51 can be joined together in an extremely simple and easy way, and the optical fibre cable does not lose its flexibility.

Tensile tests carried out on ferrules, each joined to an optical fibre cable as described, have proved that they could withstand tensile stresses of about 15 kgf. On the other hand, a structure employing the conventional adhesive bond disjoined under tensile stresses ranging from 3 to 4 kgf.

Although there are formed three stepped ridges 54 for clamping on the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51 in this embodiment, the number of the stepped ridges 54 is not limited thereto in this invention. Moreover, the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51 may feature small pits and protrusions on its surface (to form a so-called knurled surface) instead of forming the aforementioned stepped ridges. The tensile strength member 24 is firmly retained by such small pits and protrusions when the clamp ring 40 is fitted.

Although a flange 52 on the ferrule 51 in this embodiment, its structure may be varied by employing another type of clamp ring as shown in FIG. 4. In the arrangement of figure 4, the outer periphery of the clamp ring 40 and that of a ferrule 51 have the same diameter. An outer peripheral part 73 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 71 is made slightly smaller in diameter than the inside curved surface 41a of the clamp ring 40. Thus,

the optical fibre cable and the ferrule look like a one-piece element when joined.

FIG. 5A-5B show an optical fibre terminating structure according to a third embodiment of the invention.

As shown in FIG. 5, a clamp ring 60 used in this embodiment comprises: a first annular portion 61; a second annular portion 62, having a smaller diameter than the first annular portion 61; a step portion 63, connecting the first annular portion 61 and the second annular portion 62 to each other; and a clamping portion 64, which is provided immediately adjacent to the rear end of the second annular portion 62 and extends inward. All these portions are formed as a single piece, in a manner similar to the first embodiment shown in FIG. 1. The inside diameter of an opening 64b, formed by an end face 64a of the clamping portion 64, is made slightly larger than the outside diameter of the earlier mentioned optical fibre cable. The outside diameter of the second annular portion 62 is set to fit the diameter rating of a crimping tool to be used in the crimping operation. Further, the diameter of the first annular portion 61 is made slightly larger than the diameter of the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51. Thus, the tensile strength member 24 is secured between an inside curved surface 61a of the first annular portion 61 and the outer periphery 53 of the ferrule 51. The parts are joined by crimping both ends of the first annular portion 61 from around its outer periphery.

The optical fibre terminating structure of this embodiment is made by joining the optical fibre cable 23 to the ferrule 51 by using the clamp ring 60 in a manner similar to the second embodiment.

The clamp ring 60 is passed over the optical fibre cable 23. The optical fibre 21 is inserted into the optical fibre insertion hole 25 of the ferrule 51. The coated optical fibre 22 is inserted into the core insertion hole 26 of the ferrule 51. The optical fibre and the coated optical fibre 22 are secured in position with an adhesive, as shown in FIG. 5A.

The tensile strength member 24, located around the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51, is disposed between the inside curved surface of the clamp ring 60 and the outer peripheral surface of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51 at the back of the flange 52. The clamp ring 60 is crimped and fixed by using the crimping tool as shown in FIG. 5B. Thus, the tensile strength member 24 can be secured between the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule 51 and the inside curved surface 61a of the first annular portion 61. This is achieved by crimping the first annular portion 61 of the clamp ring 60 from around its outer peripheral surface. The tensile strength member 24 can also be secured between the outer periphery 53 of the rear end portion of the ferrule and an inside curved surface 63a of the step portion 63, to provide increased fixing strength. This is achieved by crimping the first annular portion 61 of the clamp ring 60 from around its outer peripheral surface. Furthermore, the jacket (formed of

PVC, for instance) of the optical fibre cable 23 can be secured by clamping it by the end face 64a at the clamping portion 64.

As shown by the foregoing discussion, the present

5 embodiment provides advantages, as does the earlier-described embodiment, in that it becomes unnecessary to use the conventionally used adhesive. The optical fibre cable 23 and the ferrule 51 can be joined together in an extremely simple and easy way. Further, the optical fibre cable does not lose its flexibility. This embodiment makes it possible to join the optical fibre to the ferrule even more firmly.

10 The clamp rings of the present invention are easy to produce and their crimping operation can be performed relatively easily. They are formed to have approximately a uniform thickness throughout their whole structure. The outer periphery of the optical fibre cable is clamped by the end face of the clamping portion which extends inward from the rear end of the second annular portion 20 as described above.

15 The optical fibre terminating structures of the present invention provide advantageous effects in that they facilitate the fixing operation due to their construction. That is, the clamp rings have an approximately uniform thickness throughout. The tensile strength member 25 is secured by crimping the clamp ring fitted over the outer periphery of the rear end portion of each ferrule. Further, the number of processes and labour hours required for the fixing operation can be reduced, since the individual components can be fixed together without using an adhesive unlike the conventional structure.

Claims

35 1. A clamp ring for connecting a tensile strength member to the periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule retaining part for holding a ferrule, in which an optical fibre of an optical fibre cable incorporating a coated optical fibre and said tensile strength member surrounding the coated optical fibre is inserted and fixed with an outer covering of said optical fibre cable is stripped off from its terminal portion, said clamp ring being characterised in that it comprises:

40 a first annular portion which fits on the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule retaining part;

45 a second annular portion;

50 a connecting portion interconnecting said second annular portion and said first annular portion; and

55 a clamping portion extending inward from the rear end of said second annular portion in such a way that the extreme end of said clamping portion secures the periphery of said optical fibre cable; and that

56 said first annular portion, said second annular

portion, said connecting portion and said clamping portion are formed as a unitary body having approximately the same wall thickness throughout.

2. A clamp ring as claimed in claim 1, said clamp ring being characterised in that it is formed by a press-forming operation.

3. An optical fibre terminating structure for connecting a tensile strength member to the periphery of a rear end portion of a ferrule, in which an optical fibre of an optical fibre cable incorporating a coated optical fibre and said tensile strength member surrounding the coated optical fibre is inserted and fixed with an outer covering of said optical fibre cable stripped off from its terminal portion, said optical fibre terminating structure being characterised in that said tensile strength member is connected to the periphery of a rear end portion of said ferrule by a clamp ring with one end thereof crimped on the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule and the other end thereof crimped on the periphery of said optical fibre cable.

4. An optical fibre terminating structure as claimed in claim 3, said optical fibre terminating structure being characterised in that said clamp ring comprises:

a first annular portion which fits on the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule;

a second annular portion;

a connecting portion interconnecting said second annular portion and said first annular portion; and

a clamping portion extending from the rear end of said second annular portion in such a way that the extreme end of said clamping portion secures the periphery of said optical fibre cable; and that

said first annular portion, said second annular portion, said connecting portion and said clamping portion are formed as a unitary body having approximately the same wall thickness throughout.

5. An optical fibre terminating structure as claimed in claim 3 or 4, said optical fibre terminating structure being characterised in that the periphery of the rear end portion of said ferrule is formed into a surface having pits and protrusions.

6. A clamp ring or optical fibre terminating structure as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the second annular portion has a smaller external diameter than that of the first annular portion.

7. A clamp ring or optical fibre terminating structure as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the first

and second annular portions, the connecting portion and the clamping portion are formed from a single piece of metal.

5 8. A clamp ring or optical fibre terminating structure as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the connecting portion is a step portion.

FIG. 1

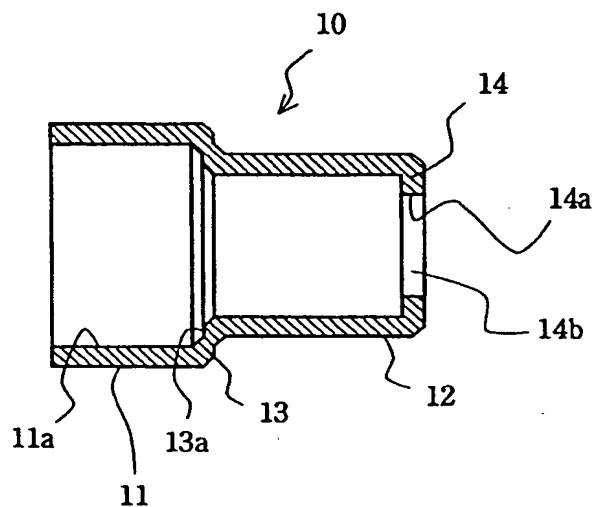
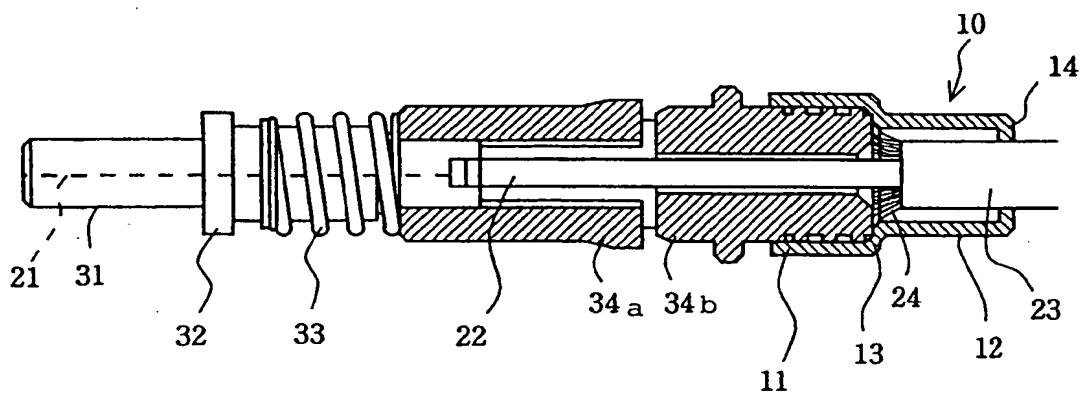


FIG. 2



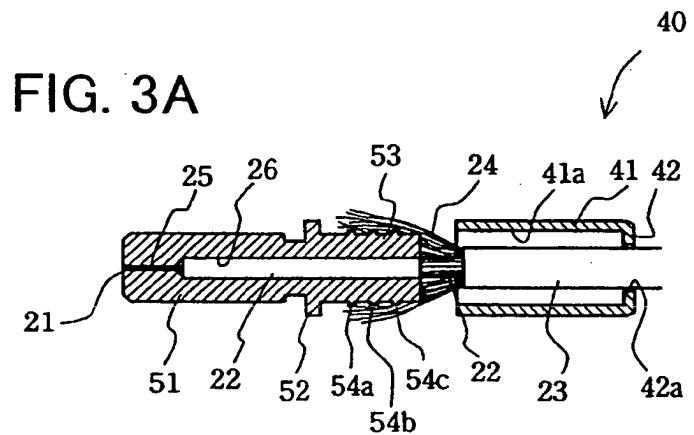


FIG. 3B

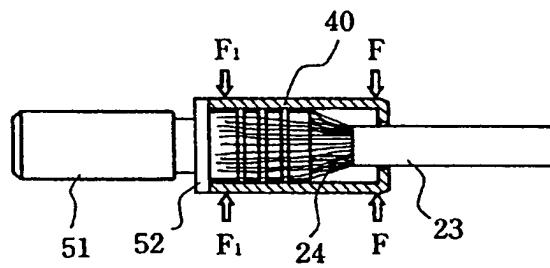


FIG. 4

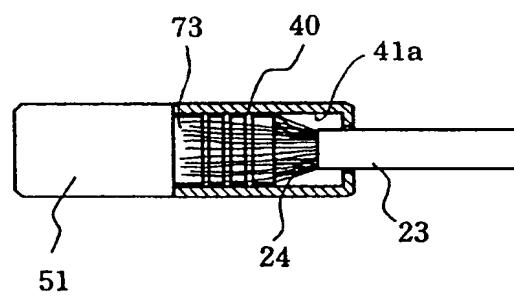


FIG. 5A

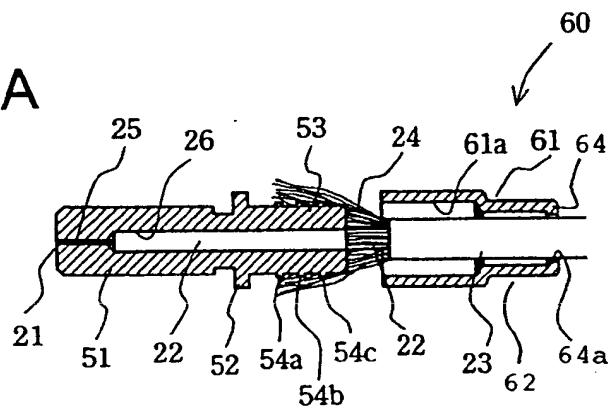


FIG. 5B

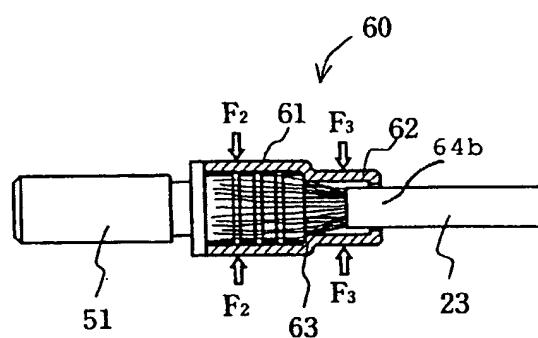


FIG. 6 PRIOR ART

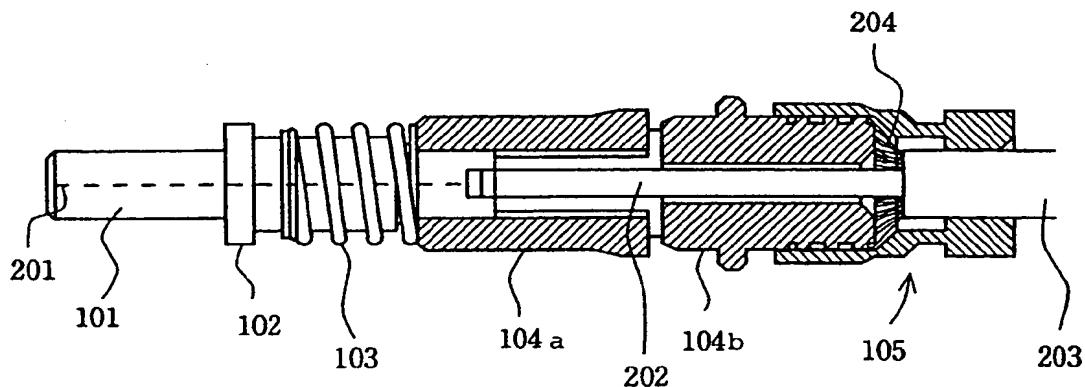


FIG. 7 PRIOR ART

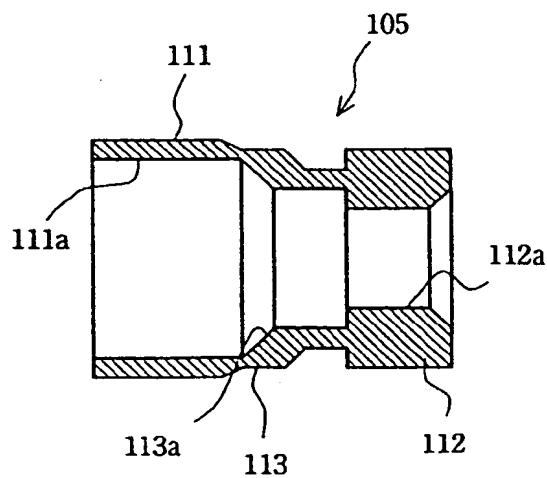


FIG. 8A PRIOR ART

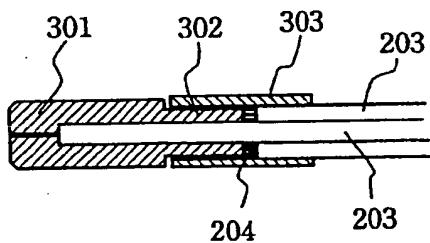
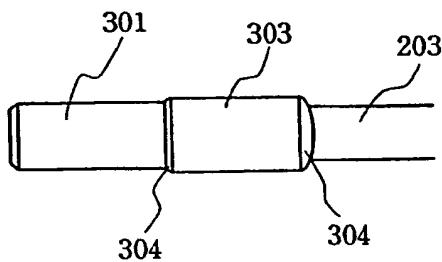
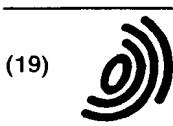


FIG. 8B PRIOR ART





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(11)

EP 0 862 072 A3

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:
07.01.1999 Bulletin 1999/01

(51) Int Cl. 6: G02B 6/38

(43) Date of publication A2:
02.09.1998 Bulletin 1998/36

(21) Application number: 98301460.6

(22) Date of filing: 27.02.1998

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU MC
NL PT SE

Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 27.02.1997 JP 44371/97
05.09.1997 JP 241527/97

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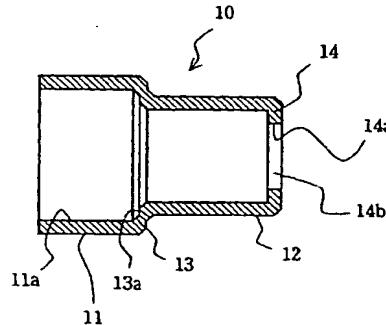
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(54) Clamp rings and optical fibre terminating structures

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FIG. 1





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 98 30 1460

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	US 5 181 267 A (GERACE JEFFREY T ET AL) 19 January 1993 * abstract; figures 8,9 * * column 8, line 24-31 *	1,6,8	G02B6/38
X	US 5 390 272 A (REPTA ERIC J ET AL) 14 February 1995 * abstract; figures 1,11,12 * * column 3, line 38-55 *	1,5,6,8	
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<p>The present search report has been drawn up for all claims</p>			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
MUNICH		16 November 1998	Beaven, G
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons R : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			